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ASIA-PACIFIC COALITION FOR EAST TIMOR

PETITION OF THE ASIA-PACIFIC COALITION FOR EAST TIMOR (APCET) AT THE UNITED NATIONS' DE-COLONIZATION COMMITTEE

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Honorable Chairperson, distinguished members of the C- 24,

Thank you for allowing us anew to petition your august committee on the question of East Timor—perhaps, and hopefully -- for the last time. We came here last year believing that the de-colonization process of East Timor was just about completed. We petitioned the C-24 with guarded feelings of hope and wonder as the historic referendum was well on its way despite the pitfalls presented by forces that wanted to derail if not, scuttle the inevitable process.

It is an ironic testament to the perceived success of the UN-brokered process that the number of petitioners this year has drastically dwindled. The historicity of this year seem to have been lost on some of our former fellow petitioners. Now, you can look forward to be disentangled earlier from listening to a parade of petitions that may have one way or another impacted on the historic process of the de-colonization of East Timor.

We are however here not only because of the epochal character of this penultimate year of the C-24, but more so because there are urgent concerns that need to be raised despite East Timor's nominal independence.

We all know what transpired after the August 30, 1999 referendum. A new nation is being born. Amidst all the challenges and birth pains attending this delivery. It was almost aborted if not for the crucial international attention and pressure that led the UN Security Council to mandate an international peacemaking force to contain the ruthless violence that attended the momentous vote for independence by the East Timorese people.

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We do not wish to dwell too much on the horrible atrocities and violence that accompanied this birthing process. We all know what happened. Some even want to forget that terrible chapter of this nation's nativity. But the East Timorese people do not want to forget. They may be able to only after they are able to forgive. And often, forgiveness comes only after justice is served. The international community does not also want to let this pass. And APCET intends to likewise take this righteous road.

There are still about 120,000 refugees scattered inside Indonesia, the bulk of them in West Timor. They have been virtually forgotten and abandoned by the world. It is a shame that we allow this to happen, to even countenance it. It is an aberration for us to turn away or downgrade our attention from this hideous situation in the guise of attending to more pressing matters inside East Timor or other flashpoints in the world. The people of East Timor will never have lasting peace if about 15% of its entire people are still essentially imprisoned in hostile camps inside Indonesia. Self-determination will only be complete if these refugees are given a free and fearless choice of returning to their land.

The UN, which is now the virtual government there, should unremittingly employ all means at its disposal to return this new batch of *diaspora* to their land. This committee can well make the proper and strongest representations within the UN system to ensure this as it has done so remarkably in the past.

Still the UN is not only being challenged by this task. It too has to ensure that justice is served against those who masterminded and executed the wanton violence in East Timor in the last 24 years of illegal occupation by Indonesia and more so before, during and after the referendum.

Calls for an international tribunal to determine the crimes engendered in East Timor should be pursued with vigor lest the authors of these misdeeds escape scot-free and twit their noses against humanity.

It is important that justice is served and administered resolutely not only to fling a warning to holdover and would-be tyrants on this planet, but to specially balm the scarred souls of the East Timorese people.

Again, the UN should lead this effort lest it is perceived anew with dragging its foot and squandering whatever prestige it has left. The UN can take its cue

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